



Little extras that help a wildlife photographer

In 2013 I wrote an article in a newsletter entitled “Being prepared” as a wildlife photographer. It is still there in the musings section of my website by clicking [here](#) and downloading the link. It might be dated but is still regularly accessed and has now been downloaded over 10,000 times.

I was telling a guest about this article on my recent really successful safari to the Mara in Kenya and describing some of the little bits of extra kit I take on a wildlife photo trip that help enormously. They suggested that I add to the article with a list of just these “little extras” so I decided to add it to the growing musings section of my website – take a look at the other [articles](#) and do let me know what you think of them plus any new ones you would like me to add.

Over the years I have gathered a selection of little extras that help and support my wildlife photography. None are very expensive but I would find it very difficult to manage without them. This is by no means an exhaustive list and I need to add that I am not in league with any of the suppliers thus don't get paid to advertise them.

LENS PROTECTION

We spend so much money on lenses and rely on them to produce our amazing photographs so they do need some tender loving care. I am not referring to wrapping them in cotton wool and not using them, they are there to be used. Many of mine are showing signs of use such as scratches in the paint on the barrel etc but the main parts of the lens, the bits that deliver the photos are looked after.

Lens hoods

We all know of and, I hope, use lens caps but these can be fiddly and are easily lost. Some time ago I came across a range of lens hoods made of neoprene and now regularly use them for all my lenses when mounted on the camera in the field. There are various designs, colour patterns and sizes on the market and they are available from most major stores – just google “lens hoodie”. They are designed to be used over the lens hood and being stretch neoprene, a few sizes will fit all lenses. They come in various colours, some camouflage and some even florescent I guess to make them easier to find if dropped. The better ones have a solid plastic disk in the top which is removable allowing the hoodie to be



washed in the washing machine if required.

Some people use these with full neoprene lens covers but I find these inhibit zoom lenses. I do however use such complete lens covers on my large primes not just to camouflage them but to protect against knocks etc.

Lens protection filters

Those who know me will have heard me say I don't like lens protection filters. Many advocate using a skylight or UV filter to protect the front lens element from dust, scratches etc. I can fully understand the notion but having tried

many different ones and even asked a mainstream lens manufacturer to test them for me. Until recently I never found any that didn't impair the lens performance. When a lens company makes a lens they carefully calibrate every part of it simply adding another piece of uncalibrated (to that lens) glass to the front will therefore inevitably impair performance. Until recently I advised simply using a lens hood and being careful. The hood protected against most accidental bumps and as I wanted to ensure maximum sharpness I didn't want to add additional non-calibrated glass layer other than creative filters. This is something I seldom do as a wildlife photographer. Recently however I came across a range of filters called Ultra Clear from an American company called Tiffen Filters. So far in all my tests and some independent ones I have asked a camera manufacturer to undertake I have seen no discernible difference with and without the filter. They are available in the UK from most major camera stores and even Amazon. A 77mm one costs about £50 at the time of writing – February 2023 – which isn't cheap but as my tests don't seem to show any loss of image quality or sharpness and it potentially saves a lens I now use them on all my lenses. I even carry a spare couple in the field on long trips such as Africa Safaris so that I can replace the if one gets damaged.



Lens cleaning

Irrespective of how careful you are you will get dust, finger prints and even rain spots etc on lenses and these will need cleaning. The traditional option is a microfibre lens cloth but be very careful as some dust can be very abrasive indeed and such cloths can scratch lenses. In much of East Africa, for example, the dust is volcanic and has a large quartz element so simply acts like sand paper, perhaps another reason perhaps for a good lens filter such as above. I prefer lens brushes and dust blowers as much of what you get on lenses is just dust. I always carry a cloth, lens brush (in protective cover) and lens blower. A few years ago, I was guiding a watch repairer on a photo safari in Africa and noticed he had an excellent little blower. It was smaller than mine had a narrower nozzle and was more powerful. I asked him about it and he told me it was a watch makers blower and he found it easier to carry and much more effective than those made for photographers. Having a finer nozzle and stronger "blow" they are also great for removing dust from other areas e.g. the lens mount and the eyecup. Having looked at many different ones I have settled on the one her used from a company called Bergeon. They are small, powerful



and importantly have a plastic nozzle not a metal one as do many of the more traditional watch makers versions. I find that I can blow most of the dust from my lens and if necessary remove any extra with a light brush. Only then do I use a cloth to save scratching the lens.



Speaking of lens brushes there are of course many on the market but I personally love the ones where the brush retracts into the handle and there is a carbon pad on the other end. The carbon pad is excellent for cleaning finger prints etc from lenses – beware though to remove dust first. The brush for getting into areas such as the eyecup and removing dust the blower wont. The best ones come with caps to protect the brush and the carbon pad when not in use. I like the Vsgo V-P01e as its metal construction and has a cap for both brush and carbon pad which are secure and don't fall off. It's a touch more expensive at £10 but the quality is well worth it.

Lens and camera protection

Whilst good camera bags are essential to protect and transport gear there are other options I use from time to time. I always like to have one or two microfibre wraps in my bag to protect delicate lenses or camera bodies. I have found the best have little Velcro corners so that the can wrap around items and “stay put”. I personally like the Domke 722 which comes in two sizes but there are other potentially cheaper versions available.



I also find when on safari it pays to pack a couple of old cotton pillow cases – when driving its easy to slip camera and lens in one of these to protect it from dust.

A little expensive perhaps but we also find small bags to store and organise batteries etc useful inside camera bags again there are many on the market and you just need to choose one that does the job.

EXTRA THOUGHTS

There is so much kit you can buy for photography but it is perhaps worth mentioning two particular items that I found people were interested in whilst in Africa. They were valuable there but equally valuable back here in the UK.

Camera Supports

Whilst tripods and monopods are always useful I find I seldom use them as they so easily get in the way. I do find however that I regularly use bean bags in bird hides or even a car. You don’t always need a large one and indeed these are often too heavy to carry far. One 9 inches by 8 inches and filled with light polystyrene beads is very useful and very portable. They also work really well with binoculars or scopes in hides.



Supporting your zoom lens on a bean bag can present problems as you move it then that can rotate focus ring and destroy your carefully select focus. Most zoom lenses come with a foot of some format, if you attach a long tripod plate – the Swiss Acra style come in up to 8 inches – to your lens foot it will sit above the bean bag or indeed any other support keeping the focus ring free of any surfaces.



More reflections and musings of a wildlife photographer.

If you have found this interesting please visit <http://www.naturesphotos.co.uk/pages/musings-of-a-wildlife-photographer.php> for more of my thoughts

If you are a member of camera club and would like me to come and share more of my thoughts on what it takes to be a successful wildlife photographer ask your programme secretary to visit my website [here](#) and look at the talks I provide together with the feedback from clubs where I have been in the past.

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